

The Sacrament of Baptism

*"TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, UNLESS ONE IS BORN OF WATER
AND THE SPIRIT, ONE CANNOT ENTER THE KINGDOM OF
GOD."*

-JOHN 3:5

Outline

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Sacraments

Sacraments are...

"efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament."

- Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1131

Sacraments of Christian Initiation

Of the seven sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist are referred to as the “sacraments of Christian initiation”

It is by reception of these three sacraments that a person is fully received into communion with the Church and is made a partaker in the divine life of Christ.

Baptism and Confirmation are unrepeatable and give the recipient an indelible mark of faith.

Biblical references

Biblical references

The history of Baptism can be traced from the Old Testament in the book of Genesis wherein we read that Adam and Eve sinned - they made a choice to defy and disobey God.

- They committed the Original Sin. All their descendants (including us), have a fallen nature and carry original sin.
- There is a need for redemption for humanity

Biblical references

The Old Testament describes how God made several covenants to help build a relationship with humanity

- with Noah (after the flood – no more floods to destroy humanity),
- with Abraham (a son, promised land and descendants) and
- with Moses (Laws/Ten Commandments)

Biblical references

- Christ changes everything.
- Redemption is at hand through God's grace.
- The new covenant is *Jesus Christ*.
 - He is the Word of God and the Son of God, made human for us. In Jesus Christ, God has given us a new basis for our relationship with God.

Biblical references

- In the New Testament, there are several instances that refer to Baptism:
 - We first see baptism with John's baptism of repentance in the Jordan river (Mk 1:4)
 - Jesus Himself starts his mission with baptism by John (Mt 3:13-15)
 - Jesus' final commission: 'Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Mt 28:19,20)
 - Paul's writings: 'put on the new nature' (Col 3:9), 'No longer be enslaved by sin' (Rom 6:6)

The Baptism of Christ

There are several reasons why Jesus consented to a baptism that, as John the Baptist noted, He did not need:

- It is a manifestation of His self-emptying and identification with humanity, which stands in need of God's grace and forgiveness (CCC 1224)
- It inaugurates His messianic mission, wherein He is anointed by the Spirit for His ministry (Luke 4:16-20). (CCC 536)
- His baptism reveals what occurs spiritually every time a Christian is baptized. When we come to the Holy Font, the heavens are opened, the Spirit descends, and the Father pronounces, "You are my beloved son/daughter."

The baptism of Jesus begins His public ministry.

Immediately after this, He goes into the wilderness to face the temptations of the devil.

The Necessity of Baptism and the Early Church

Necessity of Baptism

CCC 1257:

“The Lord Himself affirms that baptism is necessary for salvation. He also commands His disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all nations and to baptize them...The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude...”

Necessity of Baptism

The necessity for the sacrament of Baptism is spelled out clearly in the New Testament.

Two passages that do this are:

- 'No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born again of water and the spirit' (Jesus to Nicodemus) (Jn 3: 5)
- 'Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved' (Mk 16:16)

The Early Church

Only adults were baptized and only after an intense three year study program.

The sacrament was given at the Easter vigil along with Confirmation and the Eucharist.

The sacrament was given by the Bishop who was the head of each 'church' or 'parish'.

The candidate was immersed during the rite and then, once they came out of the water, they dressed in a white robe.

- These symbolized the death of their former sinful selves, "burial" in water and rising to a new life.
- The white robe shows they are alive in the new life of Christ.

The Early Church

As time progressed and Christianity prospered, bishops needed priests to help as parishes became too large.

Baptism was performed by the local priest because the bishop could not get to every parish.

In the Eastern rite the sacrament was still given to adults, but in the Western rite, it became standard practice for babies to receive baptism

- so that one could receive grace as soon as possible

The Early Church

For a valid baptism, the water must come in contact with the body in one of the following ways

- Immersion
- Aspersio (sprinkling)
- Affusion (pouring-on)

The Early Church

The Apostolic method is a three-fold immersion, as is taught by Tertullian (c. 155 – c. 240 AD), St. Basil (330 – 379 AD), St. Jerome (347 – 420 AD), and many other early writers.

- This threefold immersion is a symbol of the Three Persons of the Trinity, as well as the three days of Christ in the grave.

The Spiritual Effect of Baptism

Spiritual Effects of Baptism

It is through the sacrament of baptism that the initial **sanctifying grace** is given to us.

Baptism effects **the remission of all sin, original and actual.**

However, the inclination to sin (concupiscence) remains.

Spiritual Effects of Baptism

Baptism **gives us a right to those special graces** which are necessary for attaining salvation and for enabling us to fulfill the baptismal promises.

Baptism **infuses within us the supernatural virtues of faith, hope and charity.**

Indelibly links us to the Holy Spirit and leaves a permanent mark on our soul, like Confirmation and Holy Orders, ***it may be received only once.***

Spiritual Effects of Baptism

Baptism **incorporates us into the Church**, the Body of Christ, and gives us a spiritual bond with all of the other baptized, whether they be on earth, in heaven, or in a state of purification.

As such, it makes us eligible to receive other sacraments.

Other ways to receive baptism

The sanctifying grace of baptism can also be received in other ways:

- **Baptism of Blood:** The Church has always held the firm conviction that those who suffer death for the sake of the faith (without having received baptism) are baptized by their death for and with Christ.
- **Baptism of Desire:** For catechumens who die before their baptism, their explicit desire to receive it, together with their repentance for their sins, and charity, assures them the salvation that they were not able to receive through the sacrament.

Baptism – the practical aspects

Who can baptize?

The ordinary minister of baptism is a bishop, priest or deacon, although in case of necessity, any person can baptize.

Even a non-believer or a heretic can baptize, provided they adhere to the form of the Church, and have the intention of doing what the Church does.

The reason for this wide application of baptism is God's will to save all of humanity and the necessity of Baptism for salvation.

Why do we Baptize Infants?

Baptism confers grace objectively and without regard to the recipient.

- Unless they actively will to nullify the sacrament, the recipient receives its graces. Since a child cannot do this, they receive the fruits of the sacrament.
- Pope Innocent III (1198 -1216) said, "Original sin, which is contracted without consent, is by the power of the Sacrament, remitted without consent."

Why do we Baptize Infants?

St. Paul notes that baptism has replaced circumcision (Col. 2:11–12). In that passage, he refers to baptism as "the circumcision of Christ" and "the circumcision made without hands."

The New Testament gives several instances of entire families being baptized without omitting the children (Acts 16:15, 33; 1 Cor. 1:16).

The Church Fathers on Infant Baptism

"Baptize first the children, and if they can speak for themselves let them do so. Otherwise, let their parents or other relatives speak for them"

St. Hippolytus (170 – 235 AD), *The Apostolic Tradition* 21:16

The Church Fathers on Infant Baptism

"Do you have an infant child? Allow sin no opportunity; rather, let the infant be sanctified from childhood. From his most tender age let him be consecrated by the Spirit."

St. Gregory of Nazianzus (329 – 390 AD), *Oration on Holy Baptism* 40:7

The Ceremony

The child to be baptized has godparents who play an important role in this ceremony. For adults, the sponsor performs this role.

The godparents present the child to the priest. who asks:

- What name do you give this child?
- What do you ask of God's Church?

The Ceremony

The child is brought to the baptismal font where water is poured over the child's head and the priest says: "Name" I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The child wears a white garment.

The baptismal promises are made (usually by the godparents).

The child is then anointed with Chrism.

A candle is given to the child as a symbol that they have received the light of Christ.

The symbols

Water - cleansing, rebirth

Chrism - indelible mark on the soul.

White Garment, signifying purity of Heart - The Baptised has put on Christ

The Candle that echoes the Easter candle - Christ has enlightened the world

Other items...

The word "baptize" means to plunge or immerse.

The Church accepts as valid the baptisms of most mainline Protestant churches

Conditional baptism is conferred on the already baptized persons when validity of their earlier baptism cannot be proved

Unbaptized persons preparing to join the Church are called catechumens

Persons in preparation who are already baptized are called candidates